



## THE SAVVY CONSUMER COLUMN

### **The Savvy Consumer**

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### **Tips for Purchasing Gift Cards this Holiday Season**

The busiest shopping season of the year is upon us and many of you will be buying gift cards for friends and family. Gift cards have become one of the most popular gifts during the holiday season. Gift cards are convenient and allow the recipient to buy whatever they choose. But it is important to do your research to ensure that you are getting what you paid for.

If you plan to purchase a gift card this holiday season, here is some advice to help you make the most of your shopping experience:

1. **Check expiration dates and fees.** In the state of Tennessee, expiration dates, fees and other terms must be clearly disclosed at the time of purchase. The expiration date and fee must be legibly printed on the gift card..
2. **Ask about restrictions.** Some card issuers deduct a monthly fee from the card or apply inactivity fees if a card has not been used for a period of time. These fees will reduce the value of the card. Some gift cards do not allow cash refunds for a remaining balance on the card. You will have to either forfeit the balance or buy additional items.
3. **Know what it will cost.** Major shopping mall operators charge fees for gift cards. Gift cards issued by banks and credit card companies often expire and tend to add on fees. Fees, including activation fees, transaction fees, maintenance fees and inactivity fees, can lessen a card's value.
4. **Ask what to do in event card is stolen.** Always keep a receipt. Since gift cards are not usually registered to an individual purchaser, they can be easily stolen. Some stores do urge customers to access the store website and register cards in case of theft.
5. **Check on purchase exemptions.** Ask if the card can be used at both the physical store and the store's website. Also ask if the card can be used at other locations, not just the specific store where the card was purchased.
6. **Get as much information as possible for the card's recipient.** Ask for a toll-free number in case there are any problems with the gift card. Ask if a website is available that provides details on the card.

The Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs is here to help you understand your rights and responsibilities, to resolve complaints through the mediation process, to investigate

violations of the state Consumer Protection Act, and to clarify consumer protection laws. We are here to help consumers and business owners who have been affected by unfair business practices.

If you need our services, please feel free to call Consumer Affairs toll-free at 1-800-342-8385. Another great resource is our Web Page, where consumers can get tips on everything from investment scams to home repair. You can find this information on our website at [www.tennessee.gov/consumer](http://www.tennessee.gov/consumer).